



ECUADOR TRAVEL GUIDE

BOUNDLESS  ROADS
— THE JOURNEY IS THE DESTINATION —

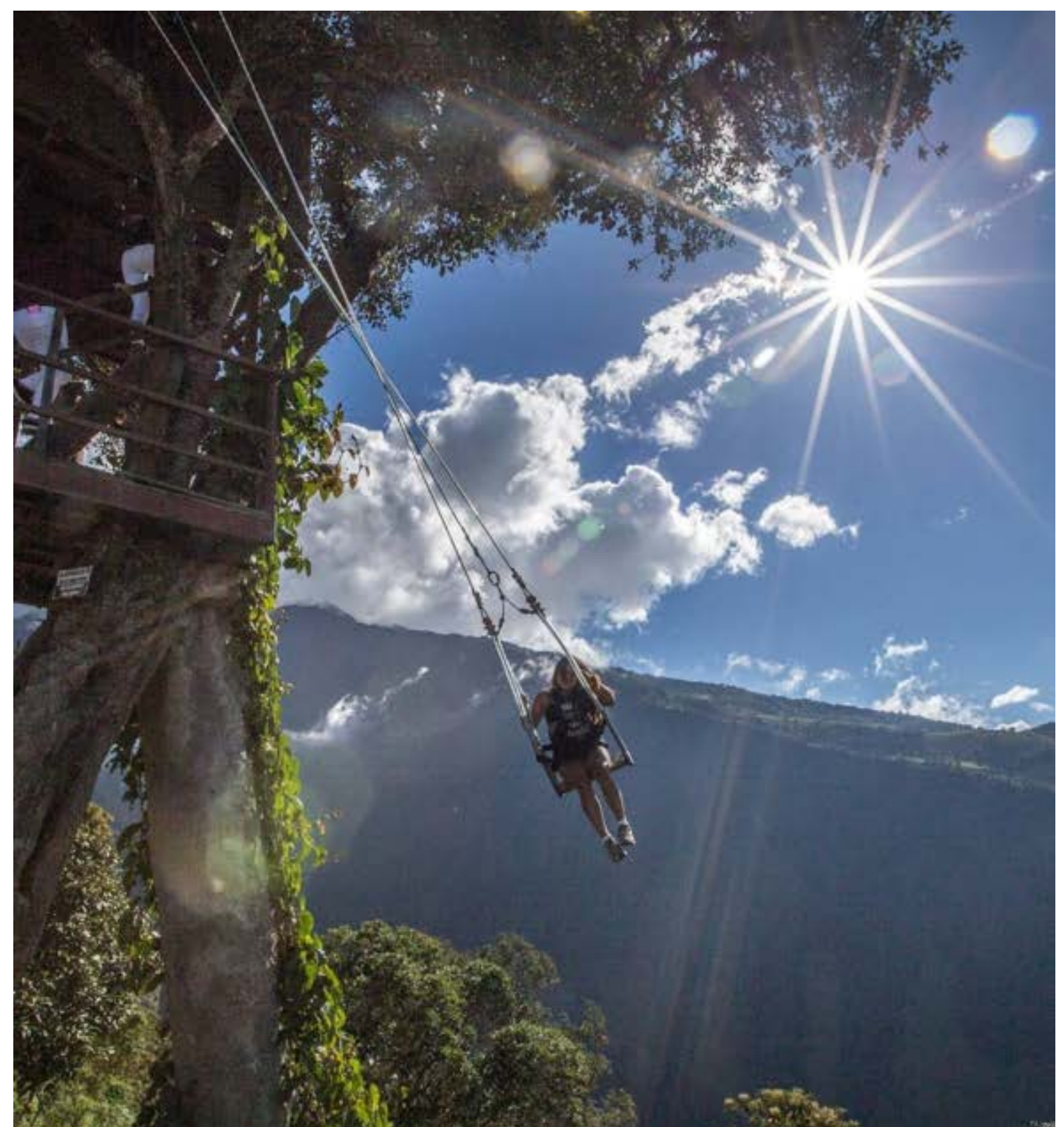
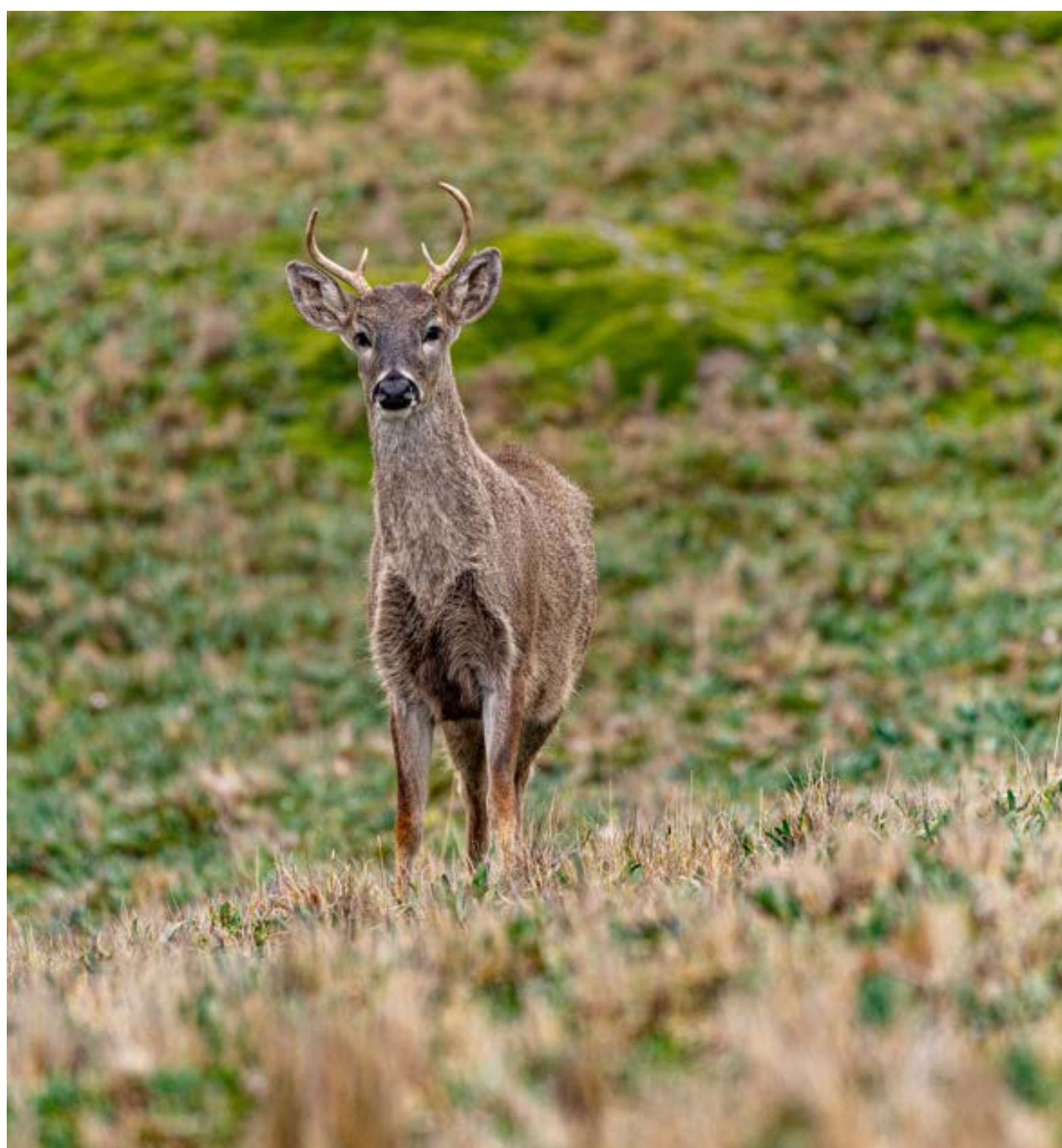


This short ebook is a summary of what I have written on my site about this incredible destination. The idea is to help you find all the necessary information to plan your trip to this little yet stunning country.

HOW TO READ THIS EBOOK

Since it's difficult to include everything about Ecuador in just a few pages, I have included some links to the related posts in the blog, in case you want to learn more about certain places in Ecuador. I hope it helps.

Ecuador is the smallest country in Latin America and yet the one with the highest diversity per square mile in the world.



Thanks to its closeness to the equator, Ecuador's territory is incredibly diverse and you can find yourself basking on the beach in your bikini in the morning and on top of a volcano in your winter jacket three hours later.

Among the amazing [interesting facts about Ecuador](#), you should know that there are 47 volcanos, some of which are still active, 32 on the mainland, and 15 in the Galapagos.

Ecuador is the preferred country for expatriates for its friendly people, relatively cheapest living costs, with decent salaries. **It's also the Latin American country with the lowest unemployment rate.**

But of course, it's most of all a beautiful country loved by outdoorsy travelers of any age and budget.

Let me tell you all the beautiful things to do in Ecuador, the best places where to stay, and all the practical tips you need to know to travel in Ecuador.

***Disclaimer:** This page may contain affiliate links. Please see my disclaimer policy [here](#).*

ECUADOR AT A GLANCE

- **ECUADOR CAPITAL CITY** Quito
- **ECUADOR LARGEST CITY** – Guayaquil.
- **OFFICIAL LANGUAGE** – Spanish, however, there are dialectal differences between Sierra and Costa Spanish; Sierra Spanish has been influenced by Quichua. Quichua and Shuar (both of which are official intercultural languages), as well as other ancestral languages, are spoken by the country's indigenous people. (source)
- **OFFICIAL RELIGION** none, however, the majority of the population is Roman Catholic
- **ECUADOR CURRENCY** (U.S.\$) – since 2000
- **POPULATION** (2019 est.) 17,379,000
- **TOTAL AREA** (SQ MI) 98,985
- **INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS** – Quito and Guayaquil are the most important although there are more than 30 international airports in Ecuador
- **WILDLIFE** – Ecuador is the smallest country in Latin America but with the highest biodiversity density in the entire world
- **MAIN CITIES** – Quito, Guayaquil, Cuenca, Baños, Tena, Ambato, Loja, Otavalo, Salinas, Rio Bamba, Ibarra, Puerto Ayora, Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, Mindo, Villamil, Vilcabamba.



FUN FACT ABOUT ECUADOR

Did you know that the [Panama hat](#) originates from Ecuador and not from Panama? Now you do! Read more [interesting facts about Ecuador](#).

BEST PLACES TO VISIT IN ECUADOR

With its incredible diversity of climate and territory, Ecuador will never stop surprising you with countless breathtaking natural sites both on the coast, with its stunning beaches, the Sierra with its soaring volcanos, waterfalls, and cloud forests, and its tropical climate home to the most incredible bird species, the Amazon (locally called Oriente) and the Galapagos with their spectacular wildlife.

Nature lovers will find their ultimate paradise in Ecuador, and that's why I have fallen in love and can't wait to go back.



Here below I will list my top 6 places to visit in Ecuador but keep in mind that there is much more than that in Ecuador to explore. More on the blog soon.

EXPLORE THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

Don't skip this part. **The Galapagos** are not as expensive as you may think. They can be expensive if you want, but it's a choice.

There are many ways to explore the Galapagos. I have traveled around these beautiful islands, the first place to be nominated UNESCO World Heritage Site, but also a protected reserve with an incredible amount of friendly wildlife to discover and stunning landscapes.

I have written a huge [guide to the Galapagos Islands](#) that you can read to plan your own trip. If you are undecided between taking a cruise or traveling on your own in the Galapagos, I have written a specific post on the [difference between a Galapagos cruise and a DIY trip](#), which I am sure will offer some clarity on both options.

If you choose an Island hopping solution that I honestly loved, I am sharing with you all the free things to do and paid tours available in the three main [Galapagos Islands, Isabela Island, San Cristobal, and Santa Cruz](#).

I have also created a few examples of [Galapagos travel itineraries](#) depending on the number of days you have, which will turn out very helpful to plan your own.



VISIT QUITO

I have spent about a month in Quito. I was staying in an amazing Airbnb in the historical center with stunning views over the city right in front of the Panecillo.

Quito is an incredible city to explore and I recommend spending some time: so much to see!

Take the Teleferico and enjoy the views from up there, or go further and hike the Ruco Pichincha, enjoy a [free walking tour](#), around the historical center.

Enjoy the local restaurants, and take a taxi to the Panecillo (it's not very safe to walk in that area). And speaking of which, take all your precautions.

Petty thefts and robberies are quite common, especially in the historical center, which is not very safe at night. La Floresta and La Mariscal, are the most vibrant and modern neighborhoods but still make sure you mind your surroundings.

In my article [on the things to do in Quito](#), I also mention all these practical tips on safety and the best neighborhoods.

INSIDER TIP: keep in mind that Quito is the second-highest city in the world with an altitude of 2800 mt (about 9000 ft), so make sure you take some time to acclimatize, and no worries if you feel dizzy or if your stomach feels funny.

Just drink a lot of water and dress in layers because the climates may change a thousand times in one day. If you keep feeling bad, go and see a doctor.

SPEND A FEW DAYS IN MINDO

Whether you are a birder or you just want to escape from the busy city of Quito, you will enjoy spending some time in [Mindó](#), the town in the clouds.

Coming on the bus from Quito you will be fascinated by the abrupt change of landscape and suddenly you will find yourself devoured by a thick lush tropical vegetation covered by a blanket of clouds. It's of unimaginable beauty.

If it's raining, do not fret. It's part of the experience. Mindó it's a tiny little village, where time seemed to have stopped a while ago.

It's a world apart where you can enjoy the simple life, spectacular walks in the jungles through [hidden waterfalls](#), get up early morning to go spot the colorful birds, visit a chocolate factory, or just relax and enjoy the sound of the rain.

HIKE THE COTOPAXI

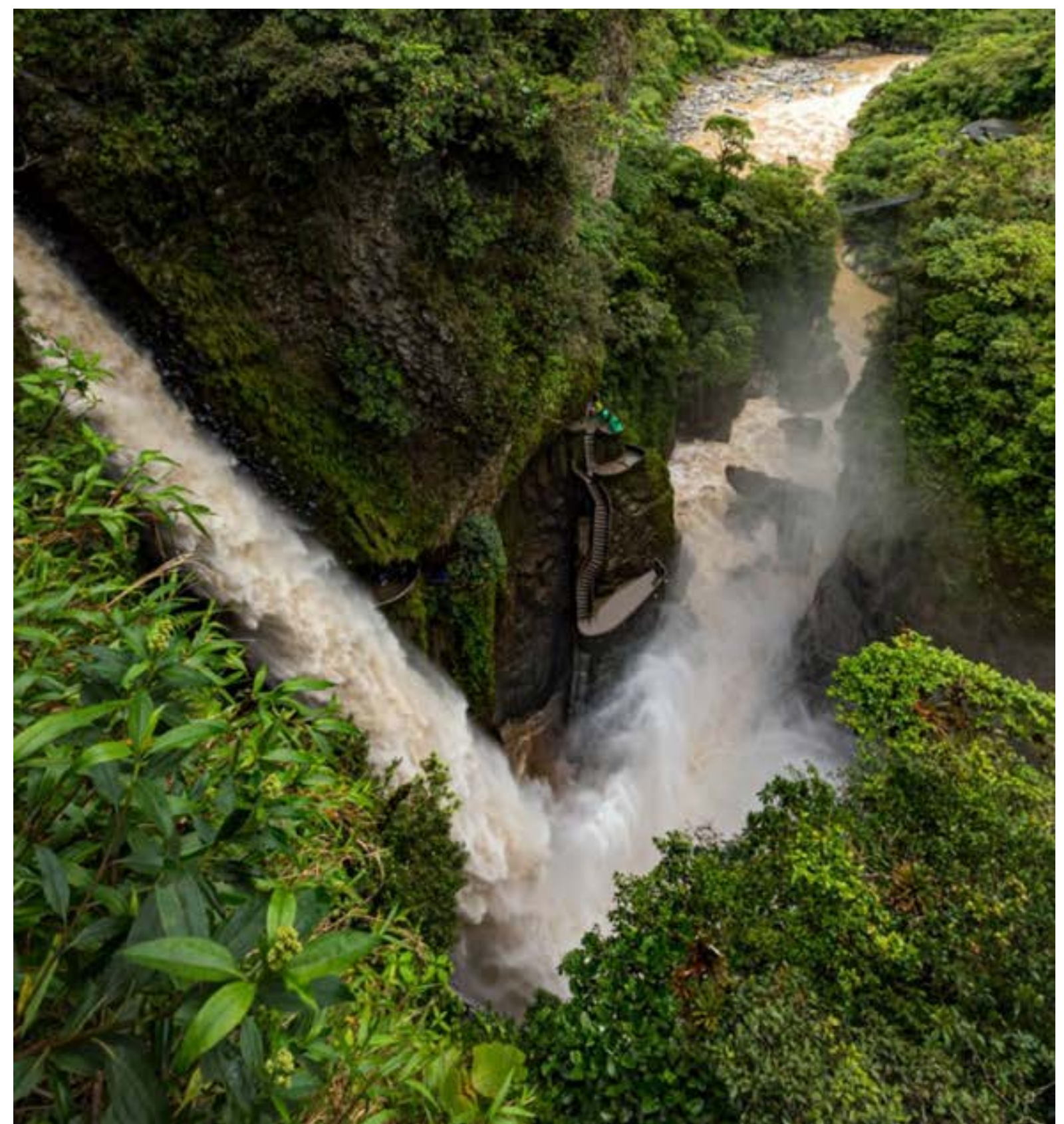
One of the must-do things in Ecuador is hiking the **Cotopaxi**. But no worries if you are not an expert hiker. It's an easy hike to the glacier. You can leave the summit to the pro. That one is no joke. But the rest is for everybody.

There are many ways to get to the Cotopaxi. You can join a tour from Quito or you can stay in one of the resorts at the foot of the Volcano.

I opted for the latter and stayed for 3 nights at **Secret Garden Cotopaxi**. Even though I don't like these sort of places where everybody eats together, and sleep together and mingle all day long (I am an introvert), in this case, I had a blast and I met many nice people.

From there you can organize many different hiking trips including the hike to the Cotopaxi Glacier, or to the summit (a little more expensive).

For those who love adventure, you can also rent bikes and cycle all the way back from the parking lot to the entrance of the park, where your transport will be waiting for you to take you back to the hotel. I didn't do it, but my fellow travelers were thrilled.



BIKE ALONG THE WATERFALL ROAD IN BAÑOS

I spent a week in Baños, as it's packed with amazing things to do, among which hiking to the famous swing, the heavens' door, a long and steep but amazing hike, splurging in one of the stunning resorts on the hills, and enjoy the hot springs, jumping from a bridge or, my favorite, biking along the waterfalls route.

I was traveling alone at that time but I met up with some people from the Secret Garden and we organized a couple of tours together. It was fun.

The last one, **El Pailon del Diablo** is breathtaking. I have never seen such a thing. The perfect combination of nature's greatness and man's work.

VISIT OTAVALO MARKETS AND ALL THE OTHER THINGS TO DO AROUND OTAVALO

Otavalo is a small town only 2 hours from Quito, mainly renowned for being one of the biggest markets in Latin America. However, after spending an entire week in this town, I have discovered that there is so much more to do, and I did almost everything, walked around Cuicocha Lake, hiked the Imbabura Volcano, explored the waterfalls, and much more. Check out my post on all the things to do in Otavalo.

Obviously, the list of things to do in Ecuador doesn't end here. Stay tuned for a more detailed post on the things to do in Ecuador.



EXPLORE CUENCA AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

Located in the southern region of Ecuador, Cuenca is a vibrant colonial city known for its beautiful colonial architecture. It's also the country's third-largest city and boasts a flourishing community of digital nomads, expatriates, and welcoming locals.

Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Cuenca offers an array of exciting activities to indulge your adventurous spirit during your visit.

Immerse yourself in the city's rich heritage by exploring its magnificent churches, taking leisurely strolls through charming parks, or losing yourself in the enchanting labyrinth of cobblestone streets. Do not miss a hike in the Parque Caja and spend a few days in the nearby mountain town of Villacabamba.

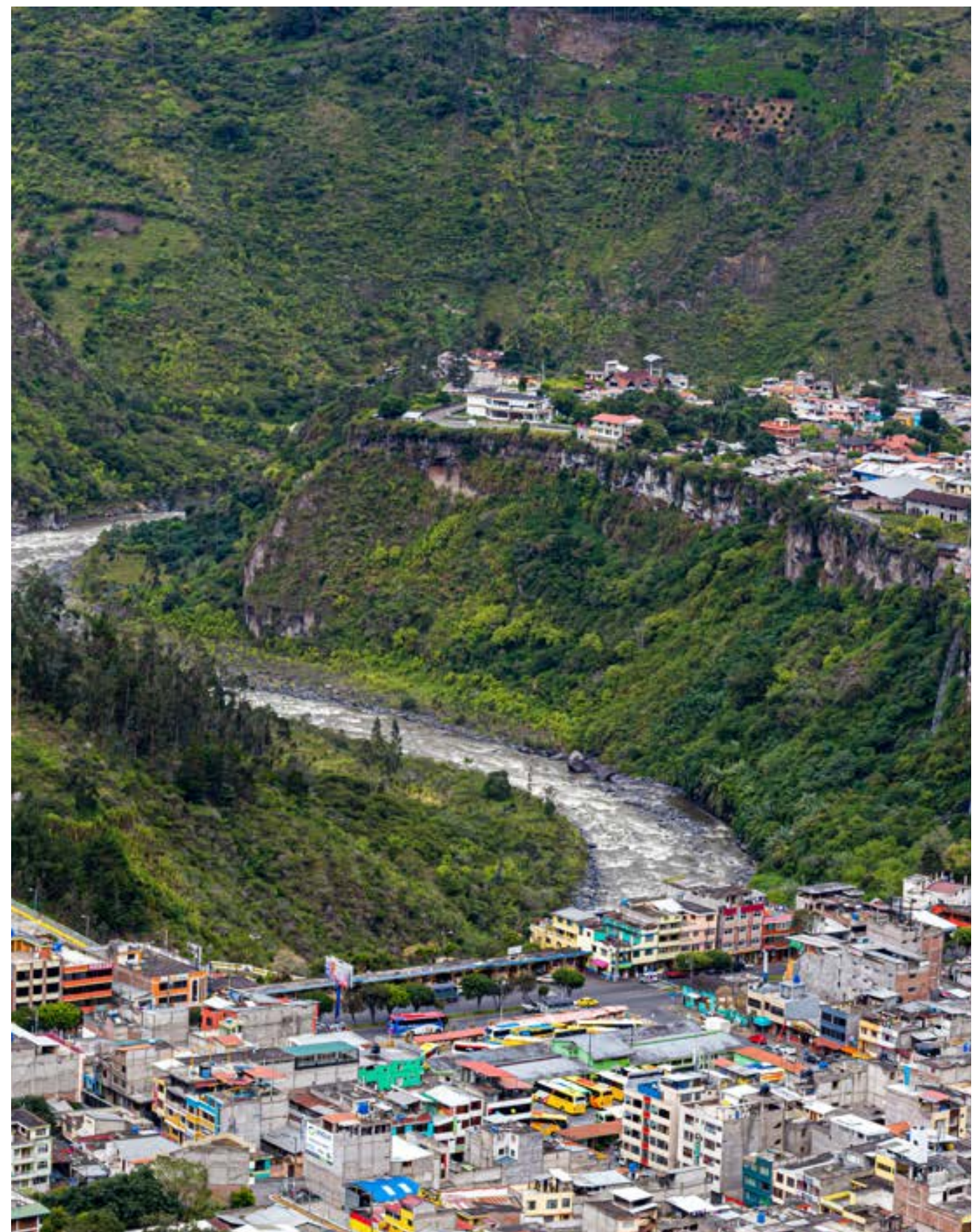
HOW TO GET AROUND ECUADOR

I was moving around Ecuador mainly by bus, (and boat in the Galapagos) and I found it extremely easy and safe.

I didn't take the train, but it's also an option, though a little more expensive. I am planning to do it next time I go to Ecuador.

There are different bus options that you can take depending on where you are going. Every city has a bus station or more where you can get your bus ticket and ask for information.

If you have a limited time, for long distances you could use domestic flights but you will miss the views. But let's talk about each option.



TRAVELING IN ECUADOR BY BUS

Traveling by bus in Ecuador is extremely cheap and easy. There are hundreds of buses that connect the major cities and small towns.

Costs range from 1 to 15 USD depending on the length of the trip. Around 40 USD for longer interstate routes such as Quito to Lima, for example. (A very long trip).

But if you are anything like me you would break down long trips into small ones and spend some time exploring the area in between. That's how I do it, of course when I have time.

You can normally show up at the station and purchase your ticket but if you prefer you can check out the time schedule and routes on these useful sites:

- [Andes Transit](#)
- [Ecuador Bus](#)

As I mentioned before I have traveled on many different public buses in Ecuador and always felt safe but if you are concerned you can always join a private bus system. It's called [Wanderbus](#) and they have different pre-establish itineraries.

You purchase the ticket for the itinerary and the desired amount of time and then you can hop on and off the bus as you please.

I don't particularly find it convenient for the way I travel, because I would still be tight to a schedule and I love to be able to change my plans freely.

However, I reckon that it's a great system and they also **include a guide** on every bus to give you great information about Ecuadorian culture and society. So you have this option as well.

TRAVELING IN ECUADOR BY AIR

In Ecuador, there are more than 30 airports connected by local airlines.

If you have limited time you can consider flying to your destinations, but also keep in mind that Ecuador is small and the distances are relatively short.

The longest one is from Quito to Guayaquil (10 hours). And I would personally opt for a daily bus because I can see the landscapes.

To get to the Galapagos, instead, your only option is by air. Either from [Quito](#) or Guayaquil, you can get either to [Santa Cruz](#) (Baltra) or [San Cristobal](#).

Here below I include the local airline websites for your convenience.

- [LATAM](#)
- [AVIANCA](#)
- [TAME](#)
- [EMETEBE](#) (private airlines for Galapagos interisland flights only)



TRAVELING IN ECUADOR BY TRAIN

As I mentioned I didn't experience traveling by train due to lack of time but I am especially enthralled by the nose devil route, which is the most popular among tourists for the thrilling (if not scary) experience.

Traveling by train in Ecuador is apparently more expensive and with that exception not particularly practical.

I will tell you more about it when I will try it. In the meantime, you can check out the [Ecuador rail site](#) to get more specific information.

WHERE TO STAY IN ECUADOR

I found the accommodation options in Ecuador are quite varied and relatively cheap, even in the Galapagos, where you can easily find a modest but decent room for **20 USD** per person.

The best part is that at the Galapagos they don't have a single supplement. So if you are traveling by yourself you just pay for yourself.

This is very unusual because normally the cost of the room is the same for 1 or 2 people or you might get a discount if you are solo, but never the exact half. So one extra point for the Galapagos.

In **Quito** and in Ecuador as well I have found great single rates which were quite comforting.

I also use **Booking.com** for hotel deals and also because I find the platform very user-friendly. It also allows you to pay when you get to the hotel, even if they ask for credit card details. That's for their cancellation policy.

Read also for the following accommodation guides in Ecuador:

- [Where to stay in Quito](#)
- [The Best Hotels in the Galapagos Islands](#)

BEST TIME TO VISIT ECUADOR

Despite being such a tiny country, Ecuador has such a variety of climates so different from one another that it makes it difficult to tell when it's the best time to go.

However, this weather information should help you decide when to visit Ecuador, depending on where you want to go and what you wish to visit.

BEST TIME TO VISIT THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

Traveling to the Galapagos is possible all year round depending on the **kind of wildlife** you wish to encounter.

However, keep in mind that from June through December it's the cool and dry season where the sea tends to be choppy and cooler.

Whereas from January through May, it's the hot and humid season where the sea is warmer and calmer (consider it if you have seasickness issues). Read more about the **best time to visit the Galapagos**.

On the coast, you will find better weather from December to April, when you find high temperatures and blue skies although showers are frequent.

From May to November there is less chance of rainfall but temperatures are cooler and it's often overcast.

BEST TIME TO VISIT THE ECUADORIAN AMAZON

The Ecuadorian Amazon, it's slightly different. The wet season is from April to September when it may rain non-stop. However, your travel planning depends on what you want to see.

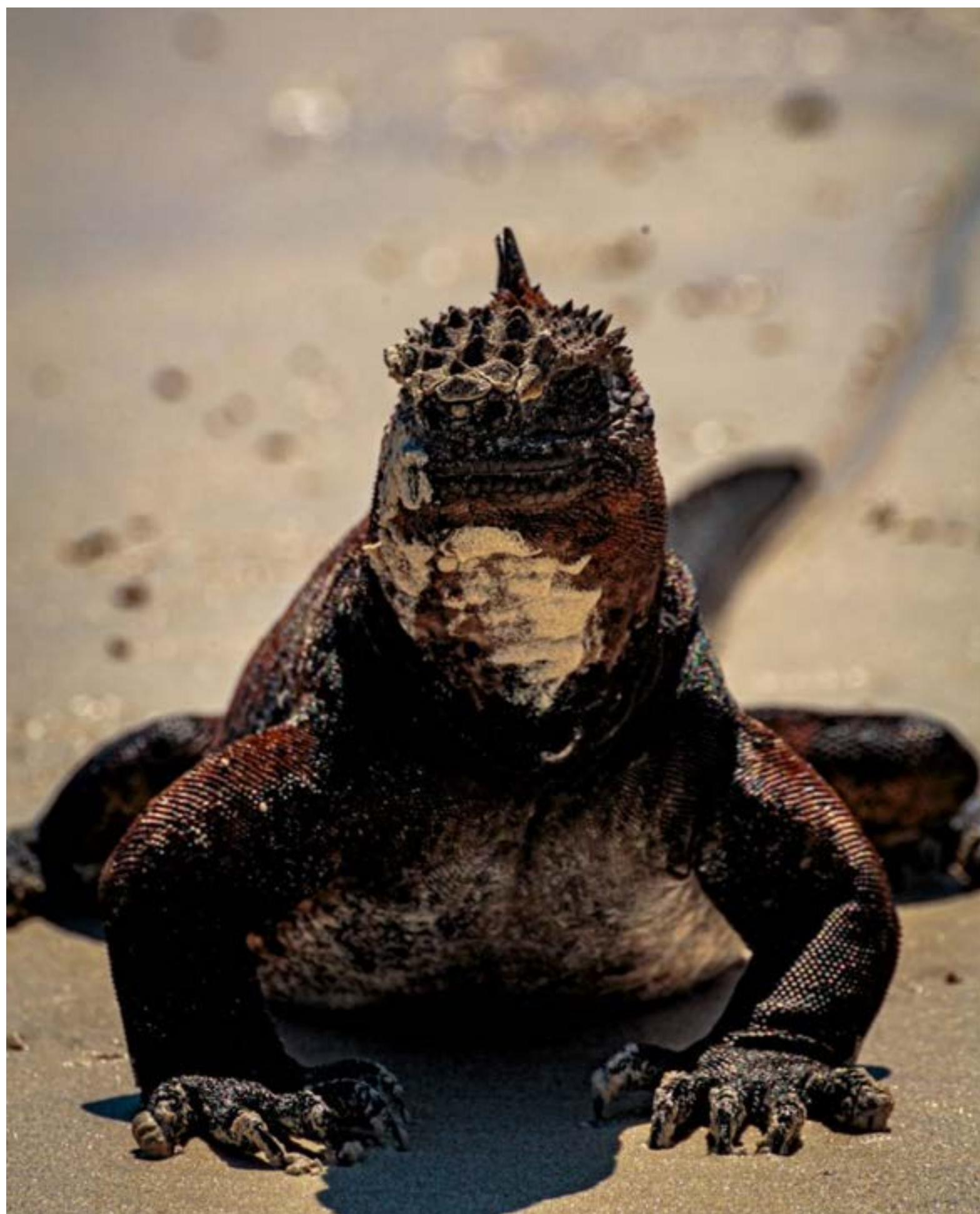
According to [Umberto Castillo](#), a Chilean photographer that lives in Ecuador and specializes in photography tours in the Amazon *"The best time to visit the Yasuni reserve in August if you want to see the Tucans because that's when they find more food after the heavy rains and they become easier to spot."*

February is a better month to see parrots, instead.

Whereas in the Cuyabeno, the wet season is more favorable for spotting monkeys because they come down from the trees and get closer to the boats.

Also, as Humberto says, **Limoncocha** and **Yasuni** are much better for birds than Cuyabeno.

I will tell you more in another post. But you can check [Humberto's website](#) for more info on Ecuadorian wildlife, photography, and tours.



BEST TIME TO VISIT THE ECUADORIAN COAST

The best time to visit the coast is **from December to April** when temperatures are high and the sky is blue, after occasional passing showers.

From May to November we have the dry season, so less chance of rainfall, but the sky is mostly overcast, and quite cool temperatures.

BEST TIME TO VISIT THE ECUADORIAN SIERRA (ANDES)

June through September is definitely the driest season when you can enjoy warm sunny weather and the sky is more clear for spectacular hikes with panoramic views from the volcanos.

It's also the highest season for the same reason and therefore expect higher costs of accommodation and flights.

ECUADOR TOURS

As I always mention, I prefer to move around on my own because I love the freedom I have to decide what to do and change plans, take a day to rest from work or go on a tour, or tag along with somebody nice I have just met, or go on my own.

For example, I loved the way things worked out when I was in Baños and two people I met in my previous destination were coming to Baños as well and we decided to go on a couple of tours together. We had a blast.

However, there are some situations where you need to take a tour if you want to see a specific place, such as in the Galapagos where all the tours are controlled by government regulations to protect the environment. In this case, I would join local tours.

For daily tours, you can check out with local travel agencies once you are on the location or you can book in advance.

It's suggestible to book in advance in the high season and if you have a limited time, so you make sure you don't miss your chance to visit your desired attraction.

It is also possible to organize travel itineraries with a guide. This option is especially used when you have a limited time and you want to see as much as possible, but also when you don't have a travel companion but don't feel comfortable traveling alone.

In my opinion, you don't need an organized itinerary to visit the Galapagos Islands.

Use my [free guide to the Galapagos](#) to understand the logistics of the island and book your individual tours directly with the local agents.

That is unless you want to go on a [cruise in the Galapagos Islands](#). In this case, I recommend [Liveaboard.com](#).

Liveaboard.com is a reputable cruise company for which I was working before Blogging became my full-time job.



IS IT SAFE TO TRAVEL IN ECUADOR AS A SOLO FEMALE TRAVELER?

As I was mentioning before I traveled around Ecuador by myself, for most parts, and I felt very safe with the only exception of the Quito historical center at night.

Make sure you avoid walking around at night and during the day pay a lot of attention to your personal belonging and avoid flaunting your wealth.

Other than that I felt really comfortable traveling by bus or walking around **Quilitoa, Otavalo, Cuenca, Mindo**, and all the small touristic towns.

Ecuadorian people are the kindest I have met in Latin America so far, ok like the Peruvians.

Obviously, petty thefts and robberies are a danger and you need to be careful using some common sense rules such as:

- Do not flash your valuables
- keep them with you when riding a bus
- Do not walk in Quito historical center at night, but even other cities
- In Guayaquil especially stay in the touristy areas and don't walk out at night.
- Avoid hailing cabs in Quito and Guayaquil, use UBER instead or Cabify the taxi app, to avoid notorious taxi scams
- Follow your gut feelings. If you don't feel comfortable in your hotel or you don't like your taxi driver for some reason, just leave.

A QUICK NOTE ON UBER

It is not an officially authorized service in Ecuador, and taxi drivers are still trying to stop Uber drivers (sometimes not using particularly orthodox methods).

However, it's the safest way to get around. Make sure you seat beside the driver's seat so that you don't cause them any issues.

Also, make the payment through the app so that there is no money exchange in the car.

OTHER THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE VISITING ECUADOR

- Ecuador has an incredible altitude variation like nowhere else. Quito is at 2800 mt above sea level, while the Galapagos is at sea level. So it might be possible that you experience [altitude sickness](#) if your body is not accustomed to abrupt changes of elevation, or even if it is. **Altitude sickness is unpredictable. If you are feeling the symptoms and they don't seem to go away, see a doctor. (that's why I always recommend insurance).**
- To enter Ecuador there are no mandatory vaccination requirements.
- To visit the Galapagos Islands there are specific entry requirements. Check my [Galapagos Guide](#) to learn about them
- In Ecuador, just like in any Latin American country you **don't flush toilet paper in the toilet**, but you toss it in the side bin.
- Tap water is not safe to drink – You can use a [refillable water bottle](#) that you can top up in your hotel if they have free drinkable water available.
- I didn't do it this time, but if you want to [rent a car in Ecuador](#), it's completely safe to drive.
- Ecuador's currency is the **US\$**, but the coins are different. Also if you want to pay with a 20\$ bill at the market, it's very likely that they don't have change.
- In Quito always dress in layers because you can have winter weather in the morning and a hot summer day in the afternoon.
- English is **not widely spoken** so a pocket Spanish dictionary goes a long way. But you would be better off if you learn the basic words before getting there.
- Buy a local sim to be able to use the most useful apps when you don't have a wifi connection.
- The main apps you should consider using are **Google Maps, Whatsapp, Uber, and Cabify, Ecuador's safety app.**

MORE POSTS ABOUT ECUADOR

- [Ecuador National Flower: The Flower of the Andes \(Chuquiraga jussieui\)](#)
- [A detailed guide to Mindo Cloud Forest Ecuador](#)
- [20 Things to Do in Cuenca, Ecuador](#)
- [The 10 Best Galapagos Liveboards for Amazing Diving](#)



PLANNING A TRIP SOON: HERE ARE MY RECOMMENDED TRAVEL RESOURCES.

- TRAVEL INSURANCE – [Safety Wing](#) or [TRAVEL INSURANCE MASTER](#)
- BOOK FLIGHTS – [Expedia](#), [Scott's Cheap Flights](#), and always remember to compare
- BOOK TOURS – [GetYourGuide](#) or [Viator](#). Some of their tours are refundable up to 24h in advance.
- HOTELS & HOMES – [Booking.com](#) – [VRBO](#)
- CAR RENTALS: [Discover Car Rentals](#)

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